



VOICES & VISIONS

PUBLISHED BY THE SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Volume 9, Number 5
October/November 2007

IMAGINE A BETTER WORLD IS POSSIBLE: Do You Believe Another World Is Possible?

Just imagine learning that the home you are slowly trying to rebuild after Hurricane Katrina is now declared a blighted property and a public nuisance. Imagine learning that the landfill near your community in Tennessee has been poisoning your family's well water for decades. Imagine living in a country so impoverished by debt that basic health care is unavailable to most citizens, including you and your children. Sometimes, the problems of our world seem so vast; we doubt we can make a difference. As your Southeast Conference representative to Justice and Witness Ministries of the United Church of Christ (JWM), I have been reminded that "... with God, all things are possible" and every one of us, with a little faith and courage, can make a difference.

JWM, led by the Rev. Linda Jaramillo, Executive Minister, is committed to working with partners across the UCC not only to imagine another world, but to take steps to make that new world a reality. Our mission is to speak and act prophetically through community mobilization, leadership training, issues education, public witness and advocacy in order to create a more just, compassionate, and peaceful world.

I can't express to you how inspiring it is to hear the stories of redemption that result from this work and to meet the JWM staff members and others who help make these small miracles happen. But I can tell you ... another world is possible in New Orleans where Ms. Otha Charles was able to save her home with the help of a young JWM intern who represented her in court. Another world is possible in Dickson, Tennessee, where the reality of environmental racism was exposed through JWM's report on toxic wastes and race, just one part of the UCC's well-known, long-term work in this area. Another world is possible in rural areas of Zambia, where free medicine is now available to the poorest of the poor because of international debt relief that was a direct result of the advocacy of JWM and other groups from all over the world. By God's grace and your giving to Neighbors In Need, we can make ... we are making ... a difference in the world.

What about in your community, city or state? Is there some work of justice, compassion or healing that calls out to you? Chances are JWM has people, ideas or resources that can help. Call the national office or email

jwm@ucc.org or cosjbg@bellsouth.net for information. Apply for a direct grant or program support from JWM for some local effort. (The Race Relations Center in Knoxville, TN is one recipient.) Reach out for the support of UCC members across the country by sharing your concern at www.ucctakeaction.org. Or just begin to imagine the possibilities! Another Knoxville is possible! Another—name your community—is possible! Another world is possible, because God IS still speaking, and with God, all things are possible.

Rev. John Bluth Gill, JWM Southeast Conference Representative

Interview with Ron Buford

Ron Buford is the former director of the national Still Speaking initiative and now serves as a consultant for Congregational Vitality with Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ.

Q: Ron, you have dedicated much of your career in the UCC to raising awareness in our churches of the importance of hospitality. What do you think are the greatest challenges that local churches face in making their churches welcoming to guests?

I think the greatest challenge is realizing what it means to be welcoming is always changing because it is determined by the needs of those who come. The better we do our job at becoming alluring to the world around us, the more difficult our welcoming job becomes. Experiencing that difficulty is success!

Q: With technology changing the way we live and worship together, what are some of the ways that local churches can use technology to reach potential visitors?

First, we can use technology to identify the interests and the location of potential visitors. It's like going on a date. The way to be interesting is to be interested in your date. The more prepared you are in advance, the better you can express interest from your date's perspective and obtain a good response. It's the same with potential visitors.

Secondly, you can use technology to entice potential visitors; the best way to do this is to surprise them. Becoming a free "hotspot" in your neighborhood is one way to offer something different and unexpected—with technology; but don't give it away without getting something. Like Starbucks, set up your hotspot so that visitors get a quick start-up page with your outreach messages for the week, an invitation with an offer, and by all means use consistent branding—like God is still speaking, and use the red comma. Add fair trade, high quality, and strong coffee giving Starbucks a run for their money.

It's like going on a date; be interested in your date. Be prepared, express interest from your date's perspective.

Q: As our churches look at new ways to witness to the Still Speaking God, what are some cultural trends to which we should pay attention?

Change, churches in the United Church of Christ are *made* for this age of change; it's what we do best. People are looking for spiritual places that move *with* the rest of their lives. They no longer have the old world paradigms that say that because something they were told 20 years ago has turned out not to be true that the whole thing is a lie; that's old age thinking. We live in an age where everyday we discover that yet another formerly held belief has been replaced with new understanding, even enlightenment. In the United Church of Christ, we do not have hierarchies and binding creeds to slow us down from enlightenment. We must teach our members, the children and the world around us about our polity and the unbridled freedom to discover that which we enjoy. Bottom line: We embrace the best of the old and are not afraid to embrace the best of the new—if it's right, even if we have to change fundamental understanding to do it because, "Our faith is over 2000 years old, our thinking is not," God is still speaking.

Q: As you look at the next 50 years of the UCC, what do you hope our denomination will look like?

At least twice the size, twice the money, twice the mission, twice the self-confidence, and many more times the joy among the people of the United Church of Christ. Oh! And one more thing ... That the churches in the Bible Belt will have been so consistently bold and intentional in saying and presenting the name United Church (pause) of Christ, even in these tough years, that the Church of Christ eventually has to change its name.

Ron Buford will be leading a workshop in Atlanta on October 5-6, 2007. The topic is "How to Grow Vital and Relevant Churches." ... Scholarships are provided based on need.

"Grace to You and Peace"

"Imagine a better world is possible!" As I write this letter, the fall program of our conference is beginning to come alive around me. Last week, I met with 14 of the 17 people who are planning to travel to Thailand next January on the TAP (Theology Among the People) global theological immersion program. This gathering of pilgrims will explore contemporary theological issues ranging from conflict transformation to the impact of globalization, interfaith conversations and much more. In August the Southeast Conference hosted a national gathering of new church developers, gathering 70 people from around the United Church of Christ to equip them to be a part of new models of ministry across the UCC. Anil

Henry, a commissioned minister of this conference, currently serving as a medical missionary in Mungeli, India, has visited a number of our congregations while on leave in August and September sharing amazing stories of his mission. As our seven TAP classes are beginning their fall schedules, we have put together our Leadership Development Series for 2008, and I am teaching a UCC History and Polity class at Vanderbilt Divinity School.

All of this is to say that our staff and our leadership together are building ministries to imagine a better world. We are working—each of us in our own settings; Kathy through the TAP program, Cameron through new church development, and I in a number of ways, to equip leaders for our congregations; and to equip our congregations to live in visionary ways in response to God's call. I hope you will consider being a partner with us in imagining a better world is possible!

Peace,
Timothy C. Downs, Conference Minister

Conference News & Announcements

The Southeast Conference has received a thank-you letter from Edith Guffey, Associate General Minister of the UCC, for our generous gift of \$3,000 in support of the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the United Church of Christ at General Synod XXVI in Hartford, CT. Conferences were asked to contribute \$2007 each. We exceeded the challenge put before us!

Conference Minister Tim Downs is currently teaching a class at Vanderbilt Divinity School on UCC History and Polity. There are 7 students enrolled. Assisting him over the course of this class will be Kathy Clark and Cameron Trimble, associate conference ministers; Susan Mitchell, co-pastor of Sankofa UCC, Atlanta, GA; John Gill, pastor, Church of the Savior, UCC, Knoxville, TN; and Joe Ingle, member of Brookmeade Congregational UCC, who specializes in prison ministry in Nashville, TN.

Anil Henry, member of Brookmeade Congregational UCC, Nashville, TN; commissioned for ministry by the Alabama-Tennessee Association as a medical missionary in Mungeli, India, has been traveling around the Conference during his leave this fall. He has visited Pleasant Hill Community UCC, TN; First UCC, Sweetwater, TN; Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, GA; as well as UCC congregations in North Carolina, Florida, Memphis, TN, and many Disciples congregations. Anil will be speaking to the Board of Directors of the Southeast Conference during his travels, and at the fall meeting of the Alabama-Tennessee Association in September.

The Southeast Conference is proud to be hosting the United Church of Christ National Youth Event for the third time in 10 years. It will be held July 24-28th,

2008 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, TN. We will be recruiting youth and adult volunteers and have decided that given our successful hosting of General Synod in 2005, we can do at least this well in 2008 with the Youth Event.

Conference Minister Tim Downs attended the Leadership Institute for Executives and Bishops conducted by the Alban Institute in July. Ask him about it!

The Conference hosted a national New Church Developers Leadership Training Event in Atlanta, August 13-17, with the Local Church Ministries Evangelism Team. 70 participants gathered for an occasion that featured nationally renowned UCC leaders in the field of evangelism and new church development. The evaluations of the event were very enthusiastic. Local people who were a part of the conference included Cameron Trimble and Kathy Clark, associate conference ministers; Susan Mitchell, co-pastor of Sankofa UCC, Atlanta; Cindy Andrews-Looper, pastor of Holy Trinity Community UCC, Nashville, TN; Kenneth Samuel, pastor and founder of Victory Church UCC, Stone Mountain, GA; and Andrew Kim, co-pastor of Salim UCC, Roswell, GA.

AROUND THE CONFERENCE: News from Local Congregations

Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, celebrated its 125th anniversary on September 9th with a full day of activities.

First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, has announced that Johnnetta B. Cole is the speaker at their homecoming celebration, September 23rd.

First Congregational Christian UCC, Birmingham, celebrates its 125th Anniversary on November 11th. Henry Simmons, pastor of St. Alban's UCC, Queens, NY, will be preaching.

Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, has sold a piece of property they purchased with support from the UCC and will use the proceeds from this sale to secure the future of their ministries.

Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Birmingham, has passed a resolution opposing the war in Iraq and calling for peace.

Betty Moon, of Sandy Creek UCC, LaFayette, Paula Long of Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta, and Vanessa Robbs, of Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga have each been named Honored Lay Woman from their respective associations, and were recognized at General Synod XXVI in Hartford, CT.

United Church of Cookeville has announced its intention to seek a pastor occasioned by the announcement of the retirement of Tom Eckert.

Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, has voted to engage in a search for a full-time minister for children and youth.

Churches are encouraged to submit items of interest to this column. Please send to tdowns@secucc.org.

TAP GOES GLOBAL

By Kathy Clark

On August 30th and September 1st, 2007, sixteen members of the inaugural class of the Theology Among the People (TAP) global theological education program met for a two-day retreat in preparation for their January 2008 trip to Thailand. Made possible by a grant from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, the purpose of the trip is to provide an experiential basis for global theological reflection, particularly in relationship to the themes of Inter/Intra-Religious Dialogue, Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding. The group will spend 10 days in Chang Mai, Thailand, studying at the Institute of Religion, Culture, and Peace of Payap University. The rest of their visit will include time in Bangkok, where they will stay at the Student Christian Center, which was founded by the late Rev. Ray Downs and his wife, Betty, the parents of the Rev. Dr. Tim Downs, Conference Minister of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ.

The retreat began Friday evening with an authentic Thai meal prepared by Dr. Downs. Later that evening, Dr. Downs reflected on his childhood experiences growing up in Thailand as the son of Presbyterian missionaries. In addition, he highlighted the history of Christian mission activity in the country and the role of the monarchy in a democratic society. The retreat also provided opportunities for the participants to get to know one another, to articulate their hopes and expectations for this pilgrimage, and to reflect on what it means to encounter the "Other." The Rev. Sarah Kim led the group in meditation several times throughout the event. The Rev. John Gill presided over a communion service, bringing the retreat to a worshipful close.

Participants will explore issues of personal interest in the Thai context in order to gain a better perspective on those issues as they are played out in their own contexts. Some of these issues include:

- The treatment of women & children in society, including international efforts to stop child prostitution and trafficking.

- Peacebuilding & conflict transformation methods as used in schools and local communities

—Hospice, palliative care and health care access, especially in rural settings

- Alternative prison options for youthful offenders
- The relationship between peace and poverty
- Arts and symbolism within Thai culture
- The life, arts and crafts of the tribal people of Northern Thailand
- Buddhism and its various practices, including the use of Buddhist principles in peacebuilding

"I love this moment when a group first comes together and we don't know each other well," reflected John Gill during the opening exercise. "Imagine this group six months from now. This journey has the potential to be transformative, not only to us as individuals, but to us as a group and to the Southeast Conference." Indeed, this cohort of pilgrims, in prayer, study, and action, will be imagining that a better world IS possible!

The Inaugural Class of TAP's Global Theological Education Initiative

Sue Couillette, Pilgrim Congregational, Chattanooga, TN

Jeanne Elrod, Community, Pleasant Hill, TN

Gwen Thomas, Victory, Stone Mountain, GA

Sandra Stamps, Victory, Stone Mountain, GA

Finley Brown, Community, Pleasant Hill, TN

Linda Hill, Victory, Stone Mountain, GA

Myrtle Johnson, Evergreen Congregational, Beachton, GA

Dennie Kelley, Church of the Savior, Knoxville, TN

Rick Grimes, Victory, Stone Mountain, GA

Deborah Cliburn, Church of the Savior, Roswell, GA

Ginny Nixon, Community, Pleasant Hill, TN

Rebecca Shillingburg, Church of the Savior, Roswell, GA

Kathy Lips, Holy Trinity, Nashville, TN

Deanne Blankenship, Community, Pleasant Hill, TN

Glenda Holland, Church of the Savior, Roswell, GA

Teresa Rector, Church of the Savior, Knoxville, TN

John Gill (co-facilitator), Church of the Savior, Knoxville, TN

Sarah Kim (co-facilitator and coordinator), Salim, Roswell, GA

Kathy Clark is the director of Theology Among the People (TAP), a leadership development program of the Southeast Conference for lay ministers. For more information about TAP or to find a group near you, email kclark@secucc.org or visit our website ...

SUMMER MISSION TRIP:

15 Youth and Adults Travel to North GA for a week of Service, Fellowship, and Fun!

Despite the hot weather and afternoon thunderstorms, volunteers from Pilgrimage UCC (Marietta, GA), Mt. Hope UCC (Julian, NC), and Pilgrim UCC (Durham, NC) spent four days working with Chiquita Berry at Twelve Stone Farm tending to long-standing projects she seldom has time (or resources) to complete herself. The team of 15 youth and adults were led by two trained site leaders in the building of a wood-framed workshop inside a barn and a rock wall around the cob chapel that watches over the farm.

Most of the group would agree that, although it was some of the hardest work they had ever done, the rock wall also was the most rewarding. Spanning over 200 feet and having to lay each stone by hand until it fit with the others like a 3D puzzle, each mission team member quickly realized the value of Chiquita's message about taking your time and allowing the process to be somewhat meditative. Hurried work yielded a wall that represented a project instead of a sanctuary, and each volunteer and leader took care to avoid such pitfalls.

When the final day was interrupted by rain, it was the youth who called for a return to the unfinished rock wall, undeterred by the weather, the deadline, or the weariness of their own tired bodies. And despite the smell of hamburgers and hot dogs on the grill down by the pond, the group continued until the last stone was in place. Because of their determination and commitment to a seemingly impossible task, the wall was completed, the chapel protected, and the doubters made into believers.

At the same time the rock wall was being constructed, a wood-framed workshop was being uniquely crafted inside a barn that once served as a place for washing hogs. With a slanted concrete floor and other obstacles in place, the site leaders measured, toiled, and taught the team members how to create a level and square room on a very uneven floor. The outcome revealed a 20' x 24' studded room complete with doors, windows, upstairs storage, and electricity. Surprisingly, while most people would prefer to work with carpentry than move 50-to-80-pound rocks, many of the volunteers requested to return to the rock wall to give their blistered hands a break from all the hammering!

Following each day's labor, the group returned to Fort Mountain State Park to replenish their energy with delicious meals prepared throughout the day by fellow team members. Evening activities run by the staff provided entertainment and continued fellowship.

The week's events culminated with a closing worship service held inside the Twelve Stone Farm chapel and surrounded by the newly completed rock wall. A service of Communion, meditation, and singing helped tie the week of work and fellowship together with the ministry of Chiquita Berry and Twelve Stone Farm. It was a perfect ending to a truly moving week of love and labor.

For more information or to request a DVD of the week's events, please email Heidi Schuler, Mountain Mission Director, at hschuler@ellijay.com.

2008 Leadership Seminars

How Can My Church Win Grants?

March 7-8, 2008; SE Conference UCC Office

Friday, 6-9 p.m.; Saturday, 9-2 p.m., Cost, \$99.00

Writing a grant can often feel overwhelming and intimidating. Where do you start? How is a grant different from a loan? Who do you ask for money? What does a good grant look like? In this seminar, Susan Anderson, a professional grant writer for an Atlanta non-profit organization, shares her insights, tips and strategies for writing winning grants.

New Ideas in Youth Ministry

May 23-24, 2008; SE Conference Office

Friday, 6-9 p.m.; Saturday, 9-2 p.m., Cost: \$99.00

A vital church gives special care and attention to how they care for and teach their young people. Youth are not the future of the church—they are the present. In this seminar, the Rev. Kristin Gerner Vaughn, Associate Pastor of Children and Youth at Pilgrimage UCC in Marietta, GA, will lead us through some of the basics of developing a vital youth program.

How Do We Grow Our Church? A Panel Reflects ...

September 12-13, 2008; SE Conference Office

Friday, 6-9 p.m.; Saturday, 9-2 p.m., Cost: \$149.00

It is the question every church is asking—how do we grow? How do we get the word out into our community about our church? How do we greet people and make them feel welcome? How do we build a strong and vital church? In this seminar, we will hear from a panel of pastors who are leading growing congregations around the United Church of Christ.

Email, Websites & Podcasts—Oh My!

October 24-25, 2008; SE Conference Office

Friday, 6-9 p.m.; Saturday, 9-2 p.m., Cost: \$99.00

A church engaged in marketing and web development? What happened to knocking on doors and inviting the neighbors to church? Well, those days are gone. So where do you start? How do you wisely spend your limited resources? In this seminar, the Rev. Cameron Trimble will lead us through developing a basic marketing strategy.

To register for these events, call Jo-Ann Trott at the Conference office ... For more information, call or email the Rev. Cameron Trimble ...

Resources & Recommended Readings:

The following resources are some that the SEC staff have found helpful to their work. Some of these resources promote theological positions which are not in alignment with the values of the United Church of Christ. Our suggestion of these resources is by no means an endorsement of these theological positions.

Church, Identity, and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times, by David Roozen and James Nieman. Published 2005 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI.
An excellent view of the current cultural context for mainline denominationalism.

Holy Conversation, by Richard Peace. Published 2006 by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.
A useful resource for small group theological discussion.

Inspiring Generosity, developed by Local Church Ministries of the UCC.
What do you mean, you haven't heard of it?! A must read for theological, scriptural and practical approaches to stewardship development in your own congregation!

Pouring New Wine into Old Wineskins: How to Change a Church without Destroying It, by Aubrey Malphus. Published 1993 by Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI.
Malphus is a conservative guy but has good insight into church renewal.

Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples, by Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger. Published 2006 by Broadman & Holman, Nashville, TN.
This book is the latest craze in church development—it reminds us to look to our past for guidance in the future.

Steeplejacking: How the Christian Right is Hijacking Mainstream Religion, by Sheldon Culver, John Dorhauer, Michelle Goldberg and Frederick Clarkson.
This book outlines a frightening strategy that has been identified as taking place in several of our own Southeast Conference congregations to pull churches out of the UCC.

Strategic Peacebuilding, by Lisa Schirch. Published 2005 by Good Books Publishing, Intercourse, PA, or www.goodbks.com.

The In-between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations, by Alice Mann. Published 1998 by the Alban Institute, Inc. Churches have difficulty transitioning from one size to the next and overcoming resistance to growth. Here is an excellent "how to" book.

The Little Book of Conflict Transformation, by John Paul Lederback. Published 2003 by Good Books Publishing, Intercourse, PA, or www.goodbks.com.

The Little Book of Restorative Justice, by Howard Zehr. Published 2003 by Good Books Publishing, Intercourse, PA, or www.goodbks.com.

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures, by Anne Fadiman. Published 1997 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, NY. Excellent reading in cross-cultural communication and the extraordinary costs to individuals, families and communities when that communication does not happen well.

To acquire or learn more about any of the following resources, email tdownloads@secucc.org.

Support Neighbors In Need

Don't forget! The Neighbors In Need offering to support the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries is scheduled to take place in a few weeks on World Communion Sunday, October 7. Celebrate the Jubilee Year of the United Church of Christ in a substantial way by making a special offering for the peace and justice work of our denomination on that Sunday (or every Sunday!) in October. Resources from JWM are available to help, including a Jubilee Justice Bible Study, bulletin inserts with stories about JWM's work, posters, offering envelopes and more. Call UCC Resources at 1-800-537-3394.

Celebrate Giving in the Southeast Conference!

Southeast Conference giving to Neighbors In Need went up significantly in 2006—from \$11,027 in 2005 to \$17,698 in 2006. This is a \$6,670 or 60.5% increase in giving in a one-year period and it was the greatest percentage increase of any conference in the UCC last year! (Only the Calvin Synod went up by a greater percentage: from \$167 to \$470.) JWM is deeply grateful for the support. It is worth noting that national NIN giving also increased overall, by

4.14%. This is good news for the UCC, and for justice in our world! Thanks to all who gave so generously.

OTHER JWM RESOURCES:

Jubilee Bible Study and reflection guide on Christ's teaching. As we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the United Church of Christ, we heed the instructions of Jubilee in our lives and in our mission. Request copies by calling 1-800-537-3394.

Another World Is Possible: A Resource Guide for the Peace with Justice Movement in the United Church of Christ, available at UCC Resources: 1-800-537-3394.

Winners and Losers—Faith Reflections on the President's Proposal Federal Budget, available online ... or call 1-866-822-8224, ext. 3700.

TAKE ACTION!!! Join the UCC Justice and Peace Action Network to receive regular email messages on important public policy matters. Learn the pressing issues and take action instantly. One click, faith-based advocacy; just log on to ***www.ucctakeaction.org*** to send faxes and emails to Federal and state officials, newspapers, and corporate executives (edit pre-written sample letters or write your own personalized messages).

Full listing of all JWM resources available at www.ucc.org/justice or cosjbg@bellsouth.net

VOICES & VISIONS

Co-Editors: Tim Downs & Cameron Trimble

Layout Editor: Jo-Ann Trott

Contributing Editor: Kathy Clark

Article ideas and submissions may be directed to the Conference Office.

1330 West Peachtree Street N.W., Suite #350
Atlanta, GA 30309

Phone: (404) 607-1993; (800) 807-1993 (outside Atlanta)

FAX: (404) 607-7939

www.secucc.org

The preceding was a transcription from the original publication, except for photographs and associated captions. Neither the original nor the transcription are copyrighted or have rights reserved; they are in the public domain for free use. Copies of the original may be obtained from the Southeast Conference office.

This transcription was recorded on November 6, 2013 by Mike Stroud, director of Project 66-16, an initiative to record, compile and write the history of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ.

